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THE SOCIOLOGICAL TREATMENT OF SOME AMERICAN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

WHILE others are at work on the higher problems of sociology, let me call attention to some study that seems to me to have much value for its everyday uses, and to be not without usefulness to the science itself. A somewhat personal account will best introduce the subject.

In opening the department of "Sociological Notes" in the *Andover Review* for March, 1886, the first of the kind anywhere I think, two pages were taken up with a sketch of a lecture, which had then been given two or three times, on a New England country village of the simplest type. This was used, much like Mr. Huxley's famous lecture on a piece of chalk, as a starting-point for the popular study of some of the elementary social institutions and their relations. The lecture has been frequently given since, and sometimes expanded into three or four lectures. It has proved useful and interesting in giving a graphic outline of what may be called the setting of many of the social problems of the times and in affording an easy introduction to sociology. More attention, I am convinced, should be given to introductory and elementary sociology. Our great sociologists are so absorbed in the deeper problems of the science that elementary instruction has been neglected. Ministers and other persons interested need, I think, to pay more attention to the rudiments. For lack of this they are missing the meaning of the familiar social institutions about them. They are overlooking the structure and functions of the church, the school, the town, the corporation, the societies, clubs, committees, and other familiar institutions. As a consequence, rule of thumb governs their everyday action instead of an intelligence clarified and directed by scientific study.

The lecture referred to grew out of an experience of the difficulty of leading an audience, even of college or theological

students, in one or two or three hours, to any fair apprehension of the elements of a modern social problem, like that of the family or country church, for example, by beginning with the remote past and working our way down to the present. It was necessary to begin with material at once familiar and comparatively simple. Then the material should also be fundamental in nature and have the characteristic of universality. The little country village met these conditions. There we find the family and communal associations in their varied forms, in germ at least. Having these, we are like the biologist who has cell and tissue for his material. More than half the entire field is open.

A second consideration regards method. We do best if we proceed from the study of structure to that of function, and not the reverse. So far as my lay opinion may be worth anything, I think progress in sociological knowledge by the people and in the science itself has been retarded by comparative neglect of this principle. Our eagerness to get at work in social philosophy and social psychology, confessedly the most important departments in the science ultimately, has made us somewhat impatient of delay over elementary work. We understand less than we otherwise might the scientific meaning of common things in practical ways, and our science is less exact and more speculative.

Then it seems to me that we should begin with social institutions rather than with the social atom—the individual, or even with his social acts. That is to say, the knowledge of forms should precede that of functions, and we should look first at social groups and then at individual social action. This order of study seems scientifically sound. It also cultivates the sociological sense, which is undeveloped for two reasons. The science is new, and a century or two of individualistic thinking on social affairs has repressed the growth of the sociological way of looking at them. We can see things politically, or economically, or ethically, but not sociologically. In other words, we have not learned to see social life whole. We are at the disadvantage of a non-musical people beginning the study and use of music.

The cultivation of the sociological sense and method among us as a people is, therefore, of prime importance.

Then, once more, we should proceed from the normal to the abnormal. As the biologist gets, if possible, fresh tissue from a healthy living organism, so must the sociologist. Too early attention to morbid social conditions, like pauperism, crime, and insanity, is not good for the beginner. He needs to look at normal society first. The slums of a city should be studied late in one's course. Even the city itself is too complex for the beginner, and should be reserved until he can analyze and compare complex social conditions. A true scientific method with familiar material will stir the imagination of the student, increase his power of vision, and often lead to some positive contribution to the science.

And now let us take a look here and there at the field itself, doing only enough in it to illustrate the meaning of what has already been said and to stir some to enter it. The sketch must be rapid and of a few salient points only.

Our little village would show us its churches, schools, stores, and shops, its town hall, its homes, roads, and perhaps sidewalks, with various minor institutions and its connections with the outside world. These would on further study give us five great classes and two forms of social institutions. For classes we should have religious, educational, industrial, political, and communicative institutions. The last includes roads of all sorts, the telegraph and telephone, and steam and water transportation. In the village we get the essentials of nearly all there is in the country. Organizations for protection, pleasure, mutual aid, and so on, would come in sub-classes, or perhaps in others additional to the cardinal. So much for classes.

Two types of social forms appear in the simple village—the primary social group, the family, or rather the home; and the secondary group. The latter appears under different names in the different classes. That is, it is the local church, the school, the shop or corporation, and the town. The family or home is the primary group in all the classes; there is no change of name in passing from one class to another. The home, it should be

noticed, is not in the list of classes, but in that of forms, being the primary group, the morphological unit of society. And its study would include an examination of it in its personnel, housing, and relations to the secondary and other higher groups. Its historical relations would also come in, if the work aimed at completeness.

Out of the secondary groups, those of the communal or collective type of association, we get the tertiary and higher groups by use of the principle of representation. In the religious class we get in this way, to use the most available example, the local church, presbytery, synod, general assembly, pan-Presbyterian assembly, interdenominational relations, and cosmic religions. The primary and secondary schools, the college, university, and library, give educational forms. The shop, retail store, wholesale store, commission house, bank, clearing-house, and foreign exchange mark the line of economic institutions. The kind of power used, the forms of organization, the kinds of control, would classify communications. Subdivisions for protective, hedonic, and other objects would be made. By the use of crayons of different colors I have found it easy to present such features as these to the eye on the blackboard, using corresponding colors to mark the various social institutions of the village. This presents to the eye various interesting facts. For instance, the church with us is independent of the state. Schools are partially so. Banking has passed from state to national control. Mails are under government control, but express transportation is not. Libraries, lighting, water supply, sewerage, and the like vary. Such are a few illustrations of the variety of material afforded by study of the bit of social tissue which a country village gives us.

The next step has been through use of earlier types of village community life to trace the outlines of the social framework of earlier times, especially aiming to show the resemblances and differences between the primary and secondary groups of the present and those of the past, that is, between the family and communal forms of our times and of earlier sociological periods, whether earlier in time only or survivals of archaic societies in

recent times, and especially the effect of these changes upon the status and function of the individual. Here we find the roots of many social institutions—the status of the individual, the will, contract, price, etc. This takes us into the study of the mark, the town, the manor, the parish, the village community, the Russian mir, the joint family of the Hindus, the patriarchal family, the ancient city of the Mediterranean, the early church, the synagogue, the social clubs of Rome and China. Thus we may go back still farther to the study of the conditions of tribal life, the horde, the clan, and look into their relation to succeeding and present forms of social life. The work is kept as simple as possible, carefully aiming at graphic outlines. An outline map of Seeböhm's village community has been used as an illustration of one stage of development.

There is great need for popular use of a book along the lines I have roughly drawn. The books available in sociology are taken up so much with the profounder discussions of theories of social life, of the psychological forces at work, of the deep underlying causes of social action, and of the trend of society, that the ordinary reader is either confused or fails to grasp the elements of the problem. He is taken into the mysteries of function before he has really seen the outlines of structure. With little or no knowledge of form, he is hurried into the advanced work of the study of social forces. He is like one trying to solve the intricate problems of the higher mathematics before he has learned to use his algebra and calculus. Or, perhaps better still, he is at the disadvantage of a student of physiology whose study of anatomy, of cell and tissue, has been neglected. He is without any adequate sense of social facts in their relations and proportions. A study like that described, aiming to give an outline of the chief social institutions of our own country in their simpler forms first, and then working toward the more complex, and then to those of other peoples and times, would do much toward meeting this difficulty. Even if all this kind of work should be left behind in the advance of sociological study, may it not be necessary for this science, like others, to have its period of attention to morphology and

comparative study? When the science is as old as botany and physiology, perhaps it may more freely leave behind the earlier processes.

Some practical applications of the proposed method may now be given. I shall take them all from the secondary group, that of communal organization. For study of the family is already well under way, and the fundamental place of the family or home insures a place for it in social science much like that given to the cell in biology. The last thirty years have brought a large number of scientific works on the ancient village community. But the scientific treatment of modern communal society still awaits the scholar. The secondary group of our times appears under such different forms and names that the common type is less easily seen. If the collection of people is for a religious purpose, it is called a church, a Sunday school, a Christian endeavor society, a missionary circle. If the object is educational, it is a public school, an academy, a class, a club, or a literary association. If its aim is chiefly industrial, it may be a shop, a corporation, a labor union, or a bank. Politically, it is a district, precinct, ward, town, or city. The larger part of the work of civilized society is done through social groups of this type that have been differentiated out of the village community of the past. They have been studied by the economist, the legal student, the educator, and others, but separately, in the several fields by themselves. It is within the province of the sociologist to bring them all together and treat them comparatively, and primarily as social institutions.

Take first our religious organizations. The New England church of more democratic type is a good object of study. It claims to have been the source of much that is best in our political democracy. But its present form is very unlike that of a hundred years ago. It is no longer a simple social solidarity, but a congeries of societies, committees, and other groups using the name and facilities of the church. These are loosely related to each other and often to the church. Their real control is sometimes in the hands of outside bodies or persons under forms not unlike trusts, but known as the great denominational

societies. The typical independent church of today probably realizes very fairly Prince Kropotkin's idea of anarchic communism. The call now comes, among Congregationalists certainly, for the co-ordination and readjustment of the great denominational societies. But this is only the problem of the local churches in larger form. Yet the two have not yet been connected in the thinking of those most interested in the subject. They are like physiologists who are keenly alive to some defective action of the great organs of the body, but who never suspect the seat of the trouble in the tissues.

Nor do we see another thing. For the fact is that the churches are only passing through, at a somewhat later period, a change that preceded it in the town. For the town also was at first a solidarity. Everything was done by the citizens in town-meeting and by a few officials acting under direct authority from the one body as a whole. Then came the school and highway districts, the school and ecclesiastical societies, the borough and incorporated village, various boards, companies, and other devices, until the waste and the cumbersome methods in the more populous towns, and the abuses in the cities, gave us the municipal problem. For some years reintegration, and reorganization on simpler plans where possible, have gone on. The New England town of today is oftener in possession of its earlier simple unity and solidarity than it was a generation or two ago. But the New England church is becoming sensitive to its new complicated condition, yet with small care for its serious study. It is even in the front ranks of those who call for municipal reform, while it rarely has a word of recognition of the common problem of church and municipality, and is consequently quite in the dark as to the rich opportunity it thus has for the training of the citizen by directing its own members to the work of ecclesiastical reform.

Again, the church is losing in its own work also for want of the scientific treatment of its own problems. Take an example of the loss from the lack of a just use of the principles of social proportion. The Congregational churches have, in common with others, two great organizations for training the young.

These are the Sunday school and young people's societies. It is clear that both these have been falling off in numbers, or gaining at a much reduced rate of increase, so long as to show a probable turn in their movement—perhaps from growth to decadence. These facts were at first denied, then ignored, and finally confessed. Apparently the problem is too serious to be much talked about, except in private circles. But sooner or later we shall probably find that much of the trouble here, as in other places, has been due very largely to disregard of the law of social proportion. Either we have set two organizations at work where one should have sufficed, or we have used one at a time out of many, taking up the latest or the one easiest to manage, instead of studying all the field and distributing our work proportionately. In this way a long list of agencies have succeeded each other, one or two at a time, or have been crowding each other, especially in country churches where numbers were limited. The home, the Sunday school, the school district meeting, the neighborhood Sunday school, the Young Men's Christian Association, and the Society of Christian Endeavor have each had their turn as the leading agency of the little churches. But the idea of studying them all and working out the place each should hold by the side of the others and in the whole, as systematically as a mill-owner constructs his mill and places its machinery, is not, to say the least, dominant. We have no sociological principles that are yet sufficiently known to be a guide in these practical ways.

Another illustration may be given. The young people's societies make much of committees and their organization. It is claimed that these are both effective and afford a training for the work of the church. One of their methods, however, is this. The entire membership of the society is divided and assigned to the several committees for the year, the chairmen of the several committees with the chief officers making up a central executive committee. To each committee is assigned a special line of work. But the shifting of members from one committee to another every year is the chief or only reliance for securing discipline in the various operations of the society.

Now here is apparently a sociological mistake, due to lack of scientific knowledge. The method is essentially that of an industrial organization rather than of a religious or even a political society. It overlooks a radical distinction between an industrial and a religious object. The industrial corporation seeks to get things done, and that at the least cost of energy and material, and with only a secondary regard for the gain in character to the doer. This is the law of business, so called. The religious society aims chiefly at the development of Christian character through religious service. It cares for the doing of things only as this contributes to this higher end. It does not always stop to calculate cost. For it seeks not its own, but others'. It is under the law of service even to the extent of sacrifice. It does not consult the market price-list when it breaks its alabaster box. Nor does it allot duties on a cut-and-dried plan. For it makes much of voluntary service. It helps best when it leaves most to individual initiative. It develops a spiritual democracy where each shares in the common planning and doing. The efficient church is not a department store, where each member is a piece in the machine, not even, as the Endeavor societies provide, with the privilege of an annual shift to a new place. It is not a machine constructed on the utilitarian plan of a corporation whose operations tend to foster the very mischiefs which the church is here to correct.

The organization and work of committees in various kinds of social bodies is a subject that needs treatment by the comparative methods of the sociologist. The handbooks on parliamentary rules have, of course, gone into the matter with care. The committee systems of Parliament and Congress have been studied. But these almost always specialize. But just where the committees of a legislature, of a corporation, of a church, and of a benefit society have different functions, requiring different methods, is rarely noted. A committee is a social organ often of the greatest power. It is, therefore, amenable to sociological treatment. The student of social action may watch the operations of committees with great profit. They are important social organs. The observance or the disregard of

their laws makes all the difference between clumsy, dilatory, futile action and skilful, prompt, and resultful operation. Here is material for an important chapter in a good handbook on the science of communal association.

Take one more example, the formal framework of associations of this secondary group. This is familiar to us under various names. We have constitutions, charters, acts of incorporation, articles of association, by-laws, rules, covenants, and sometimes only customs or usages. No small part of the operations of modern society are carried on under one or more of these forms of organization. Special treatment has been given by law-writers to the by-laws of towns, corporations, and benefit societies. The political scientists, the economists, and writers on ecclesiastical polity and educational organization have done much in their respective fields. But it now needs the attention of the sociologist who will treat it as a whole, and the various parts of it in the light of some scientific knowledge of the whole.

Inquiry will bring out the facts that a benevolent society drops its term "constitution" and takes up the old one of "by-laws;" that what is called a "constitution" of a benefit society is declared by a writer on the laws of such societies to be "only by-laws under an inappropriate name;" and that authorities on constitutional law recognize the restrictions that constitutions impose on societies and the unwisdom of confusing them with by-laws or rules. The student may discover that essentially the same differences exist between the two as between the constitutions of the United States and Great Britain. He may find, too, the beginnings of a practical recognition of scientific distinctions by the specialists in legal and parliamentary treatises. But the chances are that until the field is explored by the sociologist who will treat it as a whole by the comparative method, we shall go on with our social building much as we should if in the erection of our material buildings we employed mill architects to plan our churches and bridge builders to construct our dwelling-houses.

For such reasons as these I think there is need of a good

handbook on the structure and functions of our American social institutions, especially those of the more fundamental nature. But the book cannot come, or should not, until a great deal of scientific study has been done in the field it would cover. Social institutions are the forms which habitual social activity has taken on. They are the great conservators of social life and the channels of social progress. They are the mediating instrumentalities between the extremes of individualism, on the one hand, and of socialism, on the other. Our political, our entire social, future demands attention to the primary and secondary social forms. Keep them sound and healthy, and the problem of the larger forms of association becomes much easier of solution. The interests of American democracy are at stake in the solution. Our democratic churches have a rare opportunity to contribute to the solution of the problems of political and social democracy by learning to see that they themselves have a common task with political and economic society. The old treatises on ecclesiastical polity will soon have to be replaced by others that shall be based on the recognition of the new elements in the problem and the use of sociology in their treatment.

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